



Uruguay

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2003](#)

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The Oriental Republic of Uruguay is a constitutional republic with an elected president and a bicameral legislature. In 1999, voters elected Senator Jorge Batlle of the Colorado party President in free and fair elections; he assumed office on March 1, 2000, for a 5-year term. In legislative elections in 1999, the left-of-center Broad Front coalition won approximately 40 percent of the vote in a four-party race, thus constituting the largest congressional bloc. The two traditional parties, the Colorados and the Blancos, which collaborate in a coalition-style arrangement, together control more than half of the seats in the legislature. The judiciary is independent.

The Interior Ministry administers the country's police departments and the prison system and is responsible for domestic security and public safety. The military is responsible for external security within the prison system. Civilian authorities exercised effective control over the security forces. Some members of the security forces committed some human rights abuses.

The economy, which began recovering from a 4-year recession during the year, is a mixture of private and state enterprises and is heavily dependent on agricultural exports and agroindustry. The country's population is estimated at 3.4 million. The leading exports are meat, leather, and rice. The unemployment rate was 16 percent; the economy contracted by 10.5 percent in 2002 and did not grow during the year. Inflation rose significantly to 14.1 percent in 2002 and was 13 percent during the year.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in some areas. There were reports of police violence, including abuse of prisoners in the jails and police stations, prison conditions were poor, and court cases sometimes last for many years, resulting in lengthy pretrial detention. Violence against women, and some discrimination against women and the black minority were problems. Trafficking in persons was a problem.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary and Other Unlawful Taking of Life

There were no reports of political killings; however, one prisoner died after allegedly being struck by guards (see Section 1.c.).

The 1986 Amnesty Law prohibits criminal prosecution of members of the security forces who perpetrated extrajudicial killings, torture, and other abuses during the 12 years of military rule from 1973-85. However, some victims and relatives of victims had success using the civilian courts to seek redress.

In May, a court ordered the release of former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Juan Carlos Blanco, having absolved him of deprivation of liberty charges in connection with the disappearance of Elena Quinteros, who was allegedly abducted from the Venezuelan Embassy in 1976. In June, the Government filed new charges of aggravated homicide against Blanco in connection with Quinteros' death. By year's end, Blanco had not been reincarcerated, and the charges remained pending.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

The 1986 Amnesty Law required the Government to investigate the fate of those citizens who were detained and then disappeared during the dictatorship; however, the first three administrations following the return to democracy consistently refused to do so.

In 2000, President Batlle created a National Peace Commission to clarify the fate of citizens believed to have disappeared for political reasons during the dictatorship. The Commission received and analyzed information relative to 32 Uruguayans and 6 Argentines. On April 10, the final report was presented to President Batlle. Although the Commission did not meet with armed forces representatives, the report indicated that the Commission received and reviewed all information available in the country, as well as information from foreign embassies. The report confirmed human rights violations such as torture, illegal arrests, and detentions in clandestine centers during the military dictatorship. It prepared individual summaries of its conclusions on each disappeared person and recommended legal measures that the Government should adopt to compensate the families of the victims and resolve the victims' legal status, such as by declaring them dead. The Commission's preliminary report--published in November 2002--concluded that the fate of 20 percent of the missing citizens was probably cremation and burial at sea. The information on the fate of the disappeared detainees was made available only to the victims' families, to the President, and in one case (the Blanco case) upon request to the judiciary.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits such practices; however, there were reports of abuse of prisoners, many of which have been investigated by the Government.

The judicial and parliamentary branches of government are responsible for investigating specific allegations of abuse. In July, two cases of police abuse of detainees in Maldonado resulted in the arrest and conviction of nine policemen. There were also numerous reports of abuse of prisoners inside the prison system. Human rights groups and an organization of the families of prisoners filed several complaints that included routine beatings in processing; routine hazing and beatings of prisoners during searches; poor quality and insufficient quantities of food, bedding, and clothing; and poor access to medical care.

Conditions in prisons were poor and deteriorated during the year. Overcrowding increased due to worsening budget problems, an influx of new prisoners at the rate of 200 per month, and the partial destruction of Canelones prison during a riot in August. There were 7,100 prisoners in prison facilities designed to hold only 2,940 prisoners, causing sanitation, social, and health problems in the major facilities. The Libertad prison destroyed in a riot in 2002 continued to house hundreds of prisoners despite its official capacity of zero. As a temporary solution, the Government resorted to holding some of the overflow prisoners within modified shipping containers. To alleviate overcrowding, the Government purchased modular cells providing secure, sanitary holding facilities for up to 600 prisoners, but these new cells were not occupied by year's end. National Prisons Director Enrique Navas stated that the prison system was on the edge of collapse.

In addition to overcrowding, the penal system suffered from understaffing, corruption, and physical violence. Prisoners were not always separated according to the severity of their crimes. Narcotics, weapons, and cell phones were smuggled into several facilities, allegedly with the official collusion. Family visitation, in which family members carry in food to supplement a prisoner's diet, was allowed but was made difficult as the family members were strip-searched in unhygienic conditions and subjected to invasive searches.

In May, the Parliament's Committee on Human Rights began an investigation into prison conditions, which followed a hunger strike by inmates protesting the death of a 19-year-old prisoner, held in connection with the theft of less than \$7.50 (200 pesos). The prisoner died after allegedly being struck by prison guards. Proposals from committee members to alleviate overcrowding included a plan to turn some prisoners over to the military for housing and a change in pretrial statutes that would require a judge to look at the potential sentence an accused faces in determining the maximum time for pretrial incarceration. In September, President Batlle promulgated a law creating a legislative committee to ensure that prison conditions comply with international norms.

According to press reports and the regional AIDS rights organization ASEPO (Asociacion de Ser Positivo), the majority of prisoners infected with HIV and AIDS did not receive adequate treatment or medication. The extent of the infection and transmission rates of the disease within the inmate population was unknown.

Female prisoners were held in separate facilities from male prisoners with the exception of the Artigas prison, in which women were housed in a separate facility within the prison. In general, conditions for female prisoners were

significantly better than for male prisoners due to the small population and the availability of training and education opportunities.

Minors were held in institutions operated by the National Institute for Minors (INAME). Juveniles who committed serious crimes were incarcerated in juvenile detention centers, which resemble traditional jails and have cells. Conditions in some of these facilities were as bad as in the adult versions, with some youths permitted to leave their cells only 1 hour per day.

Juvenile offenders who were not considered to pose a threat to society were placed in halfway house facilities, oriented towards rehabilitation. These facilities provided educational, vocational, and other opportunities, and the juvenile offenders were able to enter and leave without restriction.

The Government--citing safety reasons--did not permit general prison visits by independent human rights observers during the year; however, the Government permitted inmate visitation and visits from foreign diplomats.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the Government generally observed these prohibitions in practice. The law requires the police to have a written warrant issued by a judge before making an arrest, and the authorities generally respected this provision in practice. The only exception is when the police apprehend the accused during commission of a crime.

The National Police number approximately 30,000 officers with broad jurisdiction under the direction of the Ministry of Interior. The police have a hierarchical structure with the Chief of Police, Director of Intelligence Unit, and Director of the Drug Unit reporting to the Vice Minister of the Interior. The Minister of Interior has attempted to reform the police by creating a service mentality and moving toward a community-policing model; however, low salaries resulted in petty corruption and officers taking second jobs to support their families. New police officers earn \$130 (3,610 pesos) per month and 15-year veterans earn \$180 (5,000 pesos) per month.

An internal police investigative unit receives complaints from any person concerning possible noncriminal police abuse of power, but it is understaffed and only can issue recommendations for disciplinary action. Ministry of Interior authorities act promptly if accusations of alleged police brutality are reported. Police officers charged with less serious crimes may continue on active duty; those charged with more serious crimes are separated from active service until a court resolves their cases. The 1995 Public Security Law requires a proportional use of force by the police and the use of weapons only as a last resort, and this law was respected in practice.

The authorities reportedly indicted more than 400 police officers in the last 4 years for violations ranging from corruption to abuse.

The Constitution also provides the accused with the right to a judicial determination of the legality of detention and requires that the detaining authority explain the legal grounds for the detention. Police may hold a detainee incommunicado for 24 hours before presenting the case to a judge, at which time the detainee has the right to counsel. The law stipulates that confessions obtained by the police before a detainee appears before a judge and attorney (without the police present) have no validity. Further, should a detainee claim that he has been mistreated, by law the judge must investigate the charge.

If the detainee cannot afford a lawyer, the courts appoint a public defender. If the crime carries a penalty of at least 2 years in prison, the accused person is confined during the judge's investigation of the charges unless the authorities agree to release the person on bail (which seldom happens). As a result, between 65 and 70 percent of all persons incarcerated were awaiting a final decision in their case. However, only those committing more serious crimes were actually jailed while waiting for the judge to investigate charges. The majority of persons facing charges were not jailed. The length of time the accused spends in jail pending trial also varies depending on the complexity of the case and the size of the judge's docket. The uncertainty respecting length of imprisonment contributed to tension in the prisons.

The Government does not use forced exile. The Constitution provides that in extreme cases of national emergency an individual may be given the option to leave the country as an alternative to trial or imprisonment; however, this option has not been exercised for at least 2 decades.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the Government generally respected this provision in practice.

The Supreme Court heads the judiciary system and supervises the work of the lower courts. A parallel military court system operates under a Military Justice Code. Two military justices sit on the Supreme Court but participate only in cases involving the military. Military justice applies to civilians only during a state of war or insurrection.

Trial proceedings usually are based on written arguments to the judge, which normally are not made public. Only the judge, prosecutor, and defense attorney have access to all documents that form part of the written record. Individual judges may hear oral arguments at their option. Most judges choose the written method, a major factor slowing the judicial process. There is no legal provision against self-incrimination, and judges may compel defendants to answer any question they pose. Either the defense attorney or the prosecutor may appeal convictions to a higher court, which may acquit the person of the crime, confirm the conviction, or reduce or increase the sentence.

Parliament continued delaying the implementation of a 1997 law to reform and modernize the Criminal Code. The law provides for more oral argument by prosecution and defense attorneys, less investigative responsibility for judges, and an accelerated pace for criminal trials.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits such practices, and the Government generally respected these prohibitions in practice.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respected these provisions in practice; however, the authorities may abridge these rights if persons are deemed to be inciting violence or "insulting the nation."

The independent media were active and all elements of the political spectrum freely expressed their viewpoints in both print and broadcast media. However, human rights activists and journalists alleged that state enterprises such as the telephone and electric companies on occasion withheld advertising from independent media that were critical of the Government and favored media friendly to the Government with extensive paid advertising. There were a few reports that stories critical of the Government were edited to be less critical or dropped altogether. In 2002, there were reports of at least two journalists who were fired for criticizing the Government too harshly.

The law stipulates that expression and communication of thoughts and opinions are free, within the limits contained in the Constitution, and it outlines methods of responding to "inexact or aggravating information." The law provides for between

3 months' and 2 years' imprisonment for "knowingly divulging false news that causes a grave disturbance to the public peace or a grave prejudice to economic interests of the State" or for "insulting the nation, the State, or their powers." The authorities rarely used this law and did not do so during the year.

Access to the Internet was available and unrestricted.

The national university is autonomous, and the Government did not restrict academic freedom.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The law provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice.

In May, as in prior years, thousands of persons marched in memory of the persons who disappeared during the rule of the dictatorship (see Section 1.b.). Several demonstrations protested the Government's decision to criticize Cuba for human rights violations. The demonstrators were allowed to march and express themselves freely.

Protests and demonstrations about economic conditions, labor issues, bio-technical issues, the war in Iraq, and student issues took place without interference.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There is a strict separation of church and state, and religious instruction in public schools is prohibited.

The most significant reported incident of harassment was an outbreak of anti-Semitic graffiti in several neighborhoods in Montevideo. This was traced to a small neo-Nazi group in the capital, which was quickly broken up. Following a complaint filed by Tolerancia Si (Tolerance Yes), a nongovernmental organization (NGO), the members were prosecuted under the country's strict hate crimes law and sentenced to brief jail terms.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2003 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice.

The Government grants refugee status in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In practice, the Government provided protection against refoulement and granted refugee status. The Government grants asylum only for political crimes as set forth in the 1928 Treaty of Havana, the 1889 Treaty of Montevideo, and the 1954 Caracas Convention. The Government cooperated with the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. However, the country lacks a formal mechanism for determining third country resettlement requests submitted by UNHCR. The Government grants temporary protection in cases in which a refugee's claims are verified by the UNHCR. The Government continued to cooperate with international organizations to provide temporary residence to human rights advocates who claim that they are subject to persecution in their home country; if still at risk after 1 year, the person may apply for refugee status.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage. The country is a multiparty democracy with mandatory voting for those 18 years of age or older. The Colorado party, the National (Blanco) party, and the Broad Front coalition are the major political groupings.

In November 1999, in free and fair elections, voters elected Senator Jorge Batlle of the Colorado party President, and he assumed office on March 1, 2000, for a 5-year term. In legislative elections in October 1999, the left-of-center Broad Front coalition won approximately 40 percent of the vote in a four-party race, thus becoming the largest congressional bloc. The two traditional parties, the Colorados and the Blancos, which collaborate in a coalition-style arrangement, together controlled more than half of the seats in the legislature.

Women participated actively in the political process and government, although primarily at lower and middle levels. Three of 30 senators and 13 of 99 deputies were women. None of the 13 cabinet ministers were women. There were no female justices on the Supreme Court. With the exception of an alternate deputy, there were no Afro-Uruguayans in Congress.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were generally cooperative and responsive to their views.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution and the law prohibit discrimination based on race, sex, religion, or disability. Despite these provisions, societal discrimination against some groups existed.

Women

Violence against women continued to be a problem. The law provides for sentences of 6 months to 2 years in prison for a person found guilty of committing an act of violence or of making continuing threats to cause bodily injury to persons related emotionally or legally to the perpetrator. The state-owned telephone company provided a free nationwide hotline answered by trained NGO employees for victims of domestic violence. A 2000 law increased sentences for rape and certain other sexually related crimes. The Criminal Code covers spousal abuse and spousal rape, although criminal charges rarely were initiated for those crimes.

A government office of assistance for victims of domestic violence trains police how to resolve complaints of violence against women. A directorate within the Ministry of Interior continued a public awareness campaign about domestic violence and operated community assistance centers where abuse victims receive information and referrals to government and private organizations in their area that aid abused women. Both the Ministry of Interior and NGOs operated shelters in which abused women and their families could seek temporary refuge. However, the country's economic crisis threatened assistance to an increasing number of victims of domestic violence, as lack of funding led to closure of a number of centers.

The law prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace; however, few such complaints were filed.

Women enjoyed equality under the law in the workplace but faced discrimination stemming from traditional attitudes and practices; however, there never have been any cases brought under the law. The work force exhibited some segregation by gender. Women, who made up almost one-half the work force, tended to be concentrated in lower paying jobs. Women's salaries averaged two-thirds those of men, continuing a gradual improvement with respect to pay equity. Approximately 60 percent of the students at the public university were women. Women often pursued professional careers but were underrepresented in traditionally male-dominated professions.

A small institute in the Ministry of Education coordinated government programs for women. There were a number of active women's rights groups, and many of their activities remained centered on follow-up to the platform of action of the 1995 U.N. Conference on Women.

Children

The Government generally is committed to protecting children's rights and welfare, and it regarded the education and health of children as a top priority. INAME oversees implementation of the Government's programs for children but received only limited funding for programs. The Government provided free compulsory kindergarten, primary, and secondary education, and 95 percent of children completed their primary education. Girls and boys were treated similarly. Free education was available through the undergraduate level at the national university.

There is no societal pattern of abuse of children. Minors under the age of 18 are not subject to criminal trial but receive special treatment with special judges and, when sentenced, stay in institutions run by INAME for the period determined by the judge; these institutions emphasize the rehabilitation of minors. INAME maintained an extensive network of programs, including shelters for at-risk children. INAME also operated a confidential hotline for children who were victims of domestic abuse.

UNICEF estimated that 40 percent of children under the age of 5 live in the poorest 20 percent of homes. Health care is free to all citizens, and the Government, with the help of UNICEF, has undertaken a program to educate parents regarding the need for regular checkups and immunization.

Although there were few substantiating statistics, polls and arrests of children participating in sexual work indicated that child prostitution existed. INAME has never conducted research on the subject of child prostitution, and no NGO specifically addressed the problem (see Section 6.f.).

While not yet a major problem, the incidence of sexual exploitation has increased in recent years. According to the NGO Casa de los Ninos, commercial sexual exploitation of children between the ages of 11 and 15 occurred mostly in the states bordering Brazil and Argentina. Authorities believed that this trafficking was specifically for

prostitution and pornography. There was also concern about possible child prostitution rings in Montevideo and the resort areas of Punta del Este and Maldonado.

In 2002, the State of Maldonado announced that child prostitution and sexual tourism had increased and identified 70 locations where this had occurred. For the first time, there were isolated reports of male prostitution. Anecdotal evidence also indicated that in recent years child prostitution has increased, especially in the interior of the country. Children's rights NGOs and the media received reports that minors resorted to prostitution as a means of survival in rural areas where unemployment was more than 20 percent.

Prostitution is legal in the country, and there is no law specifically prohibiting participation by minors. The Government created the Interdepartmental Commission for the Prevention and Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation, which--with INAME--was responsible for creating the national plan of action, which includes education programs.

Persons with Disabilities

There was no discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, or in the provision of other state services.

A national disabilities commission oversees implementation of a law on the rights of persons with disabilities. Although the law mandates accessibility for persons with disabilities only to new buildings or public services, the Government provided access to a number of existing buildings. The law reserves 4 percent of public sector jobs for persons with disabilities. The country has a generally excellent mental health system and an interest in the rights of persons with mental disabilities.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The country's Afro-Uruguayan minority, estimated at nearly 6 percent of the population, continued to face societal discrimination. A 1999 study by the NGO Mundo Afro found that the illiteracy rate among black women was twice the national average, that the percentage of black women who had pursued higher education was one-third that of the general population, and that one-half of Afro-Uruguayan women worked as household domestics. Afro-Uruguayans were practically unrepresented in the bureaucratic and academic sectors.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Constitution states that laws should promote the organization of trade unions and the creation of arbitration bodies; however, there is almost no legislation specifically entitling workers to form and join unions of their choice. Unions traditionally organized and operated free of government regulation. Civil servants, employees of state-run enterprises, and private enterprise workers may join unions. Unionization was high in the public sector (more than 80 percent) and low in the private sector (under 5 percent). Labor unions were independent of political party control but traditionally associated more closely with the left-of-center Broad Front political coalition.

A Ministry of Labor commission investigates anti-union discrimination claims filed by union members. There have been no such claims since 2000. Labor unions have complained that some businesses have encouraged formation of worker cooperatives, which served to reduce their labor costs. Although such cooperatives did not necessarily affect workers' social insurance and other public benefits, this outsourcing could reduce workers' job security, result in a loss of seniority, and weaken the power of trade unions and of collective bargaining.

There are mechanisms for resolving workers' complaints against employers, but unions complained that these mechanisms sometimes were applied arbitrarily. Unions maintained that organizers were dismissed for fabricated reasons, thus allowing employers to avoid penalties under the law.

Allegations by workers against the Government concerning anti-union measures, brought at the International Labor Organization's (ILO) Governing Body meeting in March 2002, remained pending at year's end.

There are no restrictions on the right of unions to form confederations or to affiliate with international trade union groups; however, the one national confederation chose not to affiliate officially with any of the world federations. Some individual unions are affiliated with international trade secretariats.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Collective bargaining between companies and their unions determines a number of private sector salaries. The executive branch, acting independently, determines public sector salaries. There are no laws prohibiting anti-union discrimination, but a 1993 executive decree established fines for employers engaging in anti-union activities. The law does not require employers to reinstate workers fired for union activities and does not require employers to pay an indemnity to such workers. In cases of legal challenges by union members for unlawful firings, courts tended to impose indemnization levels that were higher than those normally paid to dismissed workers. The ILO's Committee of Experts found that imposition of a fine "provided for by law in all cases of unjustified dismissal when the real motive is trade union membership or activity" was an inadequate protection against anti-union discrimination.

The Constitution provides workers with the right to strike. The Government may legally compel workers to work during a strike if they perform an essential service, which, if interrupted, "could cause a grave prejudice or risk, provoking suffering to part or all of the society." A few strikes took place in the transportation and education sectors.

All labor legislation fully covers workers employed in the eight special export zones. There are no unions in these zones because the few workers employed there were not in traditionally organizable occupations, that is, one in which a number of workers are employed in a nonprofessional capacity.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Bonded Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced or bonded labor, including by children, and the Government generally enforced this prohibition effectively.

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The Child Labor Code protects children, and the Ministry of Labor and Social Security is responsible for enforcing this law. Enforcement has proven difficult due to a lack of resources and the fact that the majority of child labor is in the informal sector (which accounts for 40 percent of total employment in the country). Some children worked as street vendors in the expanding informal sector or in the agrarian sector, which generally were regulated less strictly and where pay was lower. The law does not permit minors under the age of 14 to work, and this was generally enforced in practice. Minors between the ages of 14 and 15 were granted permission to work only in extremely rare circumstances and even then usually only to work with other members of their families. Minors between the ages of 15 and 18 require government permission to work, and such permission is not granted for dangerous, fatiguing, or night work.

Permission to work is only granted to minors who have completed 9 years of compulsory education or who remain enrolled in school and are working toward completing the period of compulsory education. Controls over salaries and hours for children are stricter than those for adults. Children over the age of 16 may sue in court for payment of wages, and children have the legal right to dispose of their own income. A program by INAME and an NGO to provide food vouchers of \$36 (1,000 pesos) per month to parents who take their children off the streets and send them to school continued during the year. This amount approximated what a child might earn working on the street.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The Ministry of Labor enforces a legislated minimum monthly wage that covers both the public and private sectors. The Ministry adjusts the minimum wage whenever it adjusts public sector wages. The minimum wage, set in September at approximately \$43 (1,194 pesos) per month, functions more as an index for calculating wage rates than as a true measure of minimum subsistence levels, and it did not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. The vast majority of workers earned more than the minimum wage.

The standard workweek is 48 hours in industry and 44 hours in commerce, with a 36-hour break each week. The law stipulates that industrial workers receive overtime compensation for work in excess of 48 hours and that workers are entitled to 20 days of paid vacation after a year of employment.

The law protects foreign workers and does not discriminate against them. However, to receive official protection, the companies that employ foreign workers must report them as employees. Many workers--both native and foreign--worked off the books and thus forfeited certain legal protections.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Security enforces legislation regulating health and safety conditions in a generally effective manner. However, some of the regulations cover urban industrial workers more adequately than rural and agricultural workers. Workers have the right to remove themselves from what they consider hazardous or dangerous conditions.

f. Trafficking in Persons

There are no laws specifically addressing trafficking in persons, and there were some cases involving trafficking of women and child prostitution (see Section 5). Irregular border controls also limit the collection of trafficking statistics. Officials believe that trafficking mostly affects women between the ages of 18 and 24. Suspected traffickers have been prosecuted in the past on charges of corruption, conspiracy, fraud, and other felonies. The Ministry of the Interior has primary responsibility for investigating trafficking cases. The Government prosecuted 10 cases related to trafficking in the past decade; however, no convictions were obtained.

There were no reliable estimates on the number of women who worked as prostitutes abroad--generally in Europe and Australia --or on the proportion that were induced into such work by fraud or were subjected to conditions approaching servitude. Families of three women who disappeared from Maldonado in the last decade (the last in 2000) renewed demands for an investigation of the disappearances. Recent reports of disappearances among young females in Maldonado gave rise to speculation that the three women may have been trafficked to Europe.